

## Copular verbs in English and Albanian language

**Suzana Samarxhiu (Gjata), MA**

**Ekaterina Gjergo (Strati), MA**

*University "Aleksander Moisiu" Durrës, Albania*

### Abstract

---

This paper aims to make a comparative study of copular verbs between two different linguistic systems, English and Albanian ones. The question of what the copula is, and whether it is part of the predicate or not, has been considered for years by English and Albanian linguists. As the etymology of its name suggests, the copula (from Latin copular 'to link') serves to link the predicate to the subject. Since the copula does not contribute lexical meaning of its own, those who argue that the copula is a verb often argue that it is a verb of a special sort, for example a verb empty of semantic or syntactic features. This research, also plays a crucial role in studying and analyzing the classification of copular verbs, taking into consideration their lexical meaning. Considering both languages, there are clauses which involve the juxtaposition of the subject and its complement, expressed by an adjective, noun or pronoun.

---

## Introduction

Verbs are always considered by grammarians as the core of the sentence, in which in relation to other parts of speech, form the lexical units. Grammarians share different views about its terminology. Some of them name it as a verb and a few others as predicate. Its terminology is not a problem in our study therefore we can use both of them in this paper.

The grammarians have given different opinions about the definition of predicates.

<sup>5</sup>Eckersley gives this definition "Predicate of the sentence is what is said on the subject."

Thoma Sharra, in his book on English grammar, defines the predicate as following

"Predicate, which expresses action or describes a person or item marked by the subject, is the second in importance in the sentence. Grammatically it depends on the subject "

<sup>6</sup>Scheurweigh in his English grammar highlights "Predicates is what remains of the sentence when the subject is removed "

<sup>7</sup>Fries defines "Predicate is the word which says something about the subject."

Starting from their structures, verbs are divided in two groups 1. simple predicate and 2. complex predicate. The complex predicate is sub classified into a.) verbal predicate and b. ) nominal predicate .

The complex nominal predicate describes the state or the quality of the subject. It is formed by a linking verb + the nominal part.

On the other hand too much dispute is put on the terminology of the linking verbs: "Linking verb" or "Copula"?

<sup>8</sup>Woods notes that the term copula is not clear today, therefore prefers the term "linking verb" However, She lets open the pathway to its terminology, emphasizing that they can be referred to as "Being", "Linking "or" Copulative"

She defines them as "giant equal signs" as far as the relationship between the subject and the adjective or the noun is equivalent to the equal sign (=).

---

<sup>5</sup> Comprehensive English grammar p. 87

<sup>6</sup> Grammar of the English language, p. 104

<sup>7</sup> The structure of English p. 14

<sup>8</sup> "English grammar for dummies, 2000 p. 17"

<sup>9</sup>Robin Torres-Gouzerh, who prefers to use the term "linking verb" in his English grammar book for students, defines: "Linking verbs are intransitive verb, not followed by an object and assist in the connection between the subject and its complement"

According to Michael Harvey<sup>10</sup> "linking verbs or copulas are verbs that show state of being"

We note that all these grammarians, though they may use different terms from each other, generally give the same definition for this grammatical concept.

Therefore we do not think that its terminology poses a problem in English grammar. We accept both terms (copula, linking verb) as equivalent to each other and both have a connective function in the sentence.

As far as Albanian language is concerned, the researchers debates focus largely upon the copula concept rather than on its terminology. Some of the grammarians narrow the concept and others consider it in a wider context. Albanian traditional grammar put emphasis on the fact that only the verb "to be" is used as copula.

What it is essential in determining the nature of copular verbs, is to analyze the connection of the subject and the word that comes after it, as the verb plays a key role in determining the grammatical relationships between them. The bare is the lexical meaning of the verb, the closer is the connection of the subject with the word that follows it, and the opposite, when the verb has full lexical meaning, the link between them is weaker.

In both languages, the verb "to be (jam)" is mostly used in its linking function.

Of course that in English language, there are a number of other verbs that have the same function like: see, feel, remain, become etc, but even some other ones with their full lexical meaning like: stay, lie etc (*Albanian: rri, qëndroj, shtrihem*).

---

<sup>9</sup>Intermediate English Grammar for ESL Learners, 2008 p.9

<sup>10</sup> The Nuts & Bolts of College writing, 2003 p. 15/16

Just a few Albanian grammarians, accept the linking function of these verbs, excluding the linguists, I. Sheperi<sup>11</sup> and R. Pernaska<sup>12</sup>, who along these verbs recognize the Albanian language a considerable number of other copular verbs as: : quhem, caktohem, zgjidhem, konsiderohem, shpalleme, pranohe, llogaritem, gjykohe etc.

The first linguist I. Sheperi accepts them as copulas, since there is a lexical approach to the verb meaning "be", whereas R. Pernaska argues on the weakening of the lexical meaning of these verbs.

Copular verbs are classified into two groups, 1. current and 2. resulting linking verbs.

(current linking verbs)	(resulting linking verbs)
Appear, be, feel, lie, look, remain, seem, smell, sound, stay, taste.	Become, get, grow, fall, prove, run, turn.

Verbs of the first group have a bare lexical meaning. This lexical bareness has strengthened the link between the verb and the nominal part that follows it, such as lack of the latter would make it impossible to use these verbs in the autonomous function of predicates.

Verbs of the second group generally retain their lexical meaning, however, used as copular verbs, somehow lose that sense. These verbs play merely a link between the object and its feature.

We think that the first group of the English verbs may be further sub classified into other groups according to their lexical meaning.

The first classification:

- Verbs that show existence: *be, appear, become, continue, grow, prove, remain, seem, sit.*
- Verbs with sensory nature: *sound, taste, feel, smell, look, stay*

<sup>11</sup> Gramatika dhe sintaksa e gjuhës shqipe” 1927, p. 149

<sup>12</sup> Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe 2 për shkollën pedagogjike”, 1973, p. 72

The second classification:

- The verb “be “
- Sensory verbs: *look, sound, taste, feel*
- Verbs with a state semantic undertone: *seem, appear, grow, remain, stay*

The Albanian copular verbs are classified into three groups:

- Verbs indicating a certain state
- Verbs indicating preservation of a state
- Verbs that show transition to another state

1.st group	2.nd group	3.rd group
Jam (be), ndihem (feel), dukem (seem), tregohem, paraqitem (appear), mbahem (maintain).	Mbes (remain), rri(stay), qëndroj, shtihem (lie),	Bëhem (become)

In this classification the third group is represented only by the verb “become”, which shows the transition from a state into another.

According to us, the first and the second group of this table should be melted in one group, all the verbs indicate state. Meanwhile, some other verbs be included in the third group of verbs that indicate a change of state as: kthehem (turn), rritem (grow), vjen(come) etc.

We think that these verbs are with a turn of between full lexical meaning and copular ones, bare lexical meaning.

However, sometimes it is difficult to make an absolute identification between copular and non-copular constructions. So, for practical reasons of the taxonomy of work, we propose an ongoing from non-copular verbs to quasi-copular and pure copular ones. But to pursue this guideline, we should study these verbs according to their syntactic and semantic characteristics.

*Syntactic characteristics:*

The syntactic nature of copular verbs depends on the linguistic element which is placed after it. Copular constructions are verbs which are followed by a particular grammatical category, which is called predicative. (ex: *He was quite.*)

<sup>13</sup>Otto Jespersen expresses that in sentences like "*He Was quiet*" , "*quiet*" is the nominal element that describes the subject, while the verb itself does not express any particular meaning, if not accompanied by this grammatical element.

According to him, it is important to distinguish between "*He looked angry*" and he "*He looked angrily*", as in the first sentence the copular verb is followed a grammatical category, called adjective and not adverb (in counteracting "verb + adverb" ↔ "verb + adjective").

Albanian linguists put emphasis on the treatment of using the nominal predicate, as its position after the verb, makes it semantically similar to the adverb.

Woods<sup>14</sup> suggests to avoid the use of object pronouns after linking verbs, because the nominal part after the verb must be in the nominative case and be the subject at the same time.

- *Who is there?*
- *\*It is me* (not correct)
- *It is I. Jam unë* (correct, because "I" can be used as the subject "I am", adapting to the verb itself)

It is thought that another syntactic characteristic of copular verbs in both languages is the fact that apart from the verb "seem" (al. dukem), all others can be used as action verbs, transitional or non-transitional. But, what I stress out is the fact that, to determine the type of the verb is always advisable to analyze the grammatical element that follows it.

---

<sup>13</sup> Essentials of English Grammar, 2006 p. 89-95

<sup>14</sup> "English grammar for dummies, 2010 p. 17"

### *Semantic characteristic*

Few foreign grammarians like Jespersen and Quirk, apart from pure copular verbs, recognize another category of verbs called quasi-copular or “quasi predicative”, verbs which haven’t mislaid their main meaning, but define the subject at the same time.

We totally agree with their theory considering some of their examples:  
*Joe died poor* < *Joe was poor when he died.* (Al. *Xho ishte i varfër kur vdiq*) (Quirk: p 1172 *Joe died when he was poor.* (Al. *Xho vdiq kur ishte i varfër*)  
*Joe was poor at the time of his death.* (Xho ishte I varfër në kohën kur vdiq).

*We parted the best of friends* < *We Were the best friends, when we parted.* (Jespersen: p89).

(Al. *Ne u nisëm miqtë më të mirë* < *Ne ishim miqtë më të mirë kur u nisëm.*)

Jespersen and Quirk , in order to show better the quasi copular nature of these verbs, attach another time relative clause to the main clause. In the first sentence, the verb “parted” (al. u nisem) denotes an action, but it indicates the quasi copular function of the verbs. However, this verb can be substituted by the verb “be”, what we notice on the above examples is that the meaning of the verb is not the same.

Considering Albanian grammarians, they do not recognize quasi-copular verbs. However, when they debate on copular verbs, some of them mention those verbs with full lexical meaning, but none of them denominate the quasi-copular nature of these verbs.

Given the below example, in my opinion, this theory may find support even in the Albanian language.

*Teuta erdhi e lodhur.* < *Teuta ishte e lodhur kur erdhi.*  
(Eng. *Teuta came tired* < *Teuta was tired when she came*)

We note that there are two predicates involved in a single sentence, one of them is a copula whereas the other one expresses action. The verb “erdhi” (eng. came) means “ the movement from one place to another” not only in its quasi-copular use, but in its non-transitional use as well. When this verb is used as a “quasi predicative”, it has a full lexical meaning

verb "come" means "the movement from one place to another", as it uses verb këpujore half as well as neuter. In its use as semi këpujore verb, its kuptimim appears not faded.

Based on the research studies on quasi-copular verbs, which cannot be replaced with the verb "be" without destroying the meaning of the sentence, we are faced with some verbs of this type, which are more flexible in paraphrasing the verb "am." I share this view, since the semantic meaning of the verb in the sentence (1), is similar to that of the nominal part. At the same time, the verb "stand" with the verb "am" sentence (2) are equivalent to each other..

1. *The lake froze solid. < The lake was solid*

*(al. liqeni ngriu / ngurtë < Liqeni ishte / ngrirë.)*

2. *Those things stood out/ were clear and dazzling against the background.*

*(al. këto gjëra qëndronin/ ishin të qarta)*

### *Zero copula*

Copula is the component of the clause. Sometimes, we have predicative without a copula in the clause in certain stylistic and syntactic conditions. Based on some researches, the most common cases when the copula can be omitted are:

1. Sentences which are considered as links of a long series starting with description which lie outside the sentence, that is a thought which comes from behind.

*Example: My last memory of my daddy was watching him walk out to his helicopter at the Norfolk Naval Base, where his student pilots waited respectfully at attention, their helmets under their arm.*

This sentence might be otherwise stated: *My last memory of my daddy was watching him walk out to his helicopter at the Norfolk Naval Base, where his student pilots waited respectfully at attention. Their helmets were under their arms.*

2. Exclamatory questions of a literary style, implying comparison.  
Example: *Why so smooth and silky as Mr. Murdstone at first! (Dickens)*
3. Sentences of deprecation, the subject and the predicative are placed together without a verb. Intonation plays an important role in these sentences, implying negation through interrogative sentences, in an exaggerated form.  
Example: *He a gentleman! She a beauty!*
4. The two nominal parts are homogeneous and join to each-other by means of "and" Example: *Of Course, he will come. As sailor and afraid of the weather!*  
This sentence might be otherwise stated: *How can a sailor be afraid of the weather.*
5. Exclamatory clauses, in which it is obvious from the whole situation what one is talking about:  
Example: *How delightful! What a nasty smell!*  
This is frequent in some stock phrases such as: *Sorry, my mistake! Just my luck. All the more reason for to marry again.*
6. When the nominal part follows certain expressions such as: "no matter". It is often used in this way before an interrogative clause.  
Examples: *No matter how wild or extravagant the assertion. There are always people ready to believe it. He had to do what he thought right, no matter what the consequences.* Before "no matter" may also be a preposition: *At no matter what risk, the thing must be accompanied quickly. In the presence of no matter who.*
7. In exclamatory sentences which express irony or contempt.  
Example: *A good, honest trade you're learning, Sir Peter. A pretty mess we shall be in by then! A confused nuisance women are! But the things these girls would say! The hypocrite that he felt himself as he said this!*
8. A construction in colloquial speech consists in placing the predicative first and than the subject without a verb. This word-order is generally due to strong emotion .

*Example: Thrice blessed they that master so their blood. Quite serious, all this, though it reads like a jest. Pretty encouragement this for a lover! Awful rotters, those undergraduates! How splendid of you to think of that. Needless to say, he never mentioned that afterwards.*

## **Conclusion**

Copular verbs are considered as “giant equal signs” which make possible the relationship between the subject and its compliment. In order to determine the nature of the copular verbs, it is important to analyze the connection of the subject and the word that comes after it, as the verb plays a key role in determining the grammatical relationships between them. The bare is the lexical meaning of the verb, the closer is the connection of the subject with the word that follows it, and the opposite, when the verb has full lexical meaning, the link between them is weaker. In both languages, the copular verbs are classified according to their lexical meaning, copular verbs with bare lexical meaning and those with full lexical meaning.

The grammatical category which comes after these verbs, determines the syntactic characteristics of the copulas, whereas the semantic analyses of these verbs make the distinction between copular and non-copular constructions and another category of verbs, quasi-predicative.

We draw in conclusion these quasi-copular characteristics: They are not “meaningless linking units; They are verbs that express action; They let fall the adjectives that follow them, without changing the meaning of the sentence.

## References

- Akademia e shkencave të Shqipërisë, Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe II, Tiranë, 1997
- Asako Yoshitomi, Tae Umino, Masashi Negishi “Readings in second language pedagogy and second language acquisition” John Benjamins B.V, 2006
- Bernd Kortmann “Dialectology meets typology: dialect grammar from a cross-linguistic perspective”, 2004 . p. 61. Walter de Gruyter&Co Berlin
- Çeliku. M. “Tekst Ushtrimesh për Sintaksën e Shqipes Standarde”, 2008 Shënimi:27/28/29, p.114-118
- Den Dicken “Relators and linkers: the syntax of predication, predicate inversion, and copulas” 2006. p. 44. Massachusetts
- Dhrimo. A. “Mbi disa çështje të klasifikimit morfologjik të mbiemrave” 1969. Studime filologjike Nr.1 p. 49-69
- Eckersley “Comprehensive English grammar” p. 87
- Eli Hinkel “Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning” Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 2005
- Eva Deinzer “Teaching Grammar: Approaches and Methods”, Germany, 2007
- Eveline Podgorski “The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching”
- Fries “The structure of English” p. 14
- Harvey. M. “The Nuts & Bolts of College writing”, 2003. p. 15-16 Hackett Publishing Company, Inc USA
- Harrie Wetzter “The typology of adjectival predication”, 1996 p165-166 Mouton de Gryter ,Berlin
- Heycock , Kroch “Relators and linkers: the syntax of predication, predicate inversion, and Copulas,” 2006 p.44. Pullum Cambridge
- Higgings “Copular clauses”, 1979 p 204-293
- Jespersen. O. “Essentials of English Grammar”, 2006. p 89-95. George Allan&Unwin Ltd, UK
- Laurie Rozakis “The complete idiot’s guide to grammar and style”, 2003. p.37 McGraw Hill Company United States of America .